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SUBJECT: FINLAND RAMPS UP METHANE USE

11. (U) On February 9, econoff accompanied Sirkka Vilkamo, Deputy Directory General of Renewables and Energy Efficiency Division from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, to the Ammassuo landfill (about 30 km west of Helsinki) to learn more about methane collection and utilization in Finland's district heating and power systems.

12. (U) The largest landfill in the Nordic countries, Ammassuo has been recovering biogas, mainly methane, since 1996 using an impressive array of 220 gas wells. Accounting for half of the methane collected in Finland, Ammassuo pumps the methane to a power plant 11 km away where it produces electricity (163 gigawatt hours last year) and powers a small district heating boiler. At the current collection rate, Ammassuo is projected to generate methane for power production for at least the next 30 years. While landfills are a great source of methane, private farms represent the fastest-growing source for additional methane capture and utilization in Finland. To stimulate methane recovery and use by farmers, the GOF provides grants to farmers of up to 40 percent of the total construction cost of methane projects. A small, but rapidly growing number of farmers are able to run all of their operations from methane. (Note: Methane is a greenhouse gas that is 23 times stronger than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. It also has a relatively short atmospheric lifetime of approximately 12 years. These two characteristics make methane emissions reductions particularly effective at mitigating global warming in the near term - i.e., the next 25 years. End note.)

13. (U) The Government of Finland views methane as a valuable local source of energy and a substitute for fossil fuels in heat and energy production. In 1997 Finnish law mandated that methane be recovered and used for power production, resulting in a four fold increase in the last ten years. To further promote biogas use in Finland, the Finnish government contracts with the Finnish Biogas Association and the University of Joensuu to produce an annual statistical report on Finnish biogas production and usage. Finland currently collects biogas from a wide range of sources including 18 wastewater treatment plants, 7 farms and 33 landfills throughout the country. While the production of biogas from landfills is quite high (118,404 million cubic meters in 2005), the efficiency of the collected gas is unfortunately still quite low, with nearly one third being flare burned. The Finnish government has mandated that more methane be used for power production, with Ammassuo serving as the model since nearly all of its biogas is utilized to generate power.

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